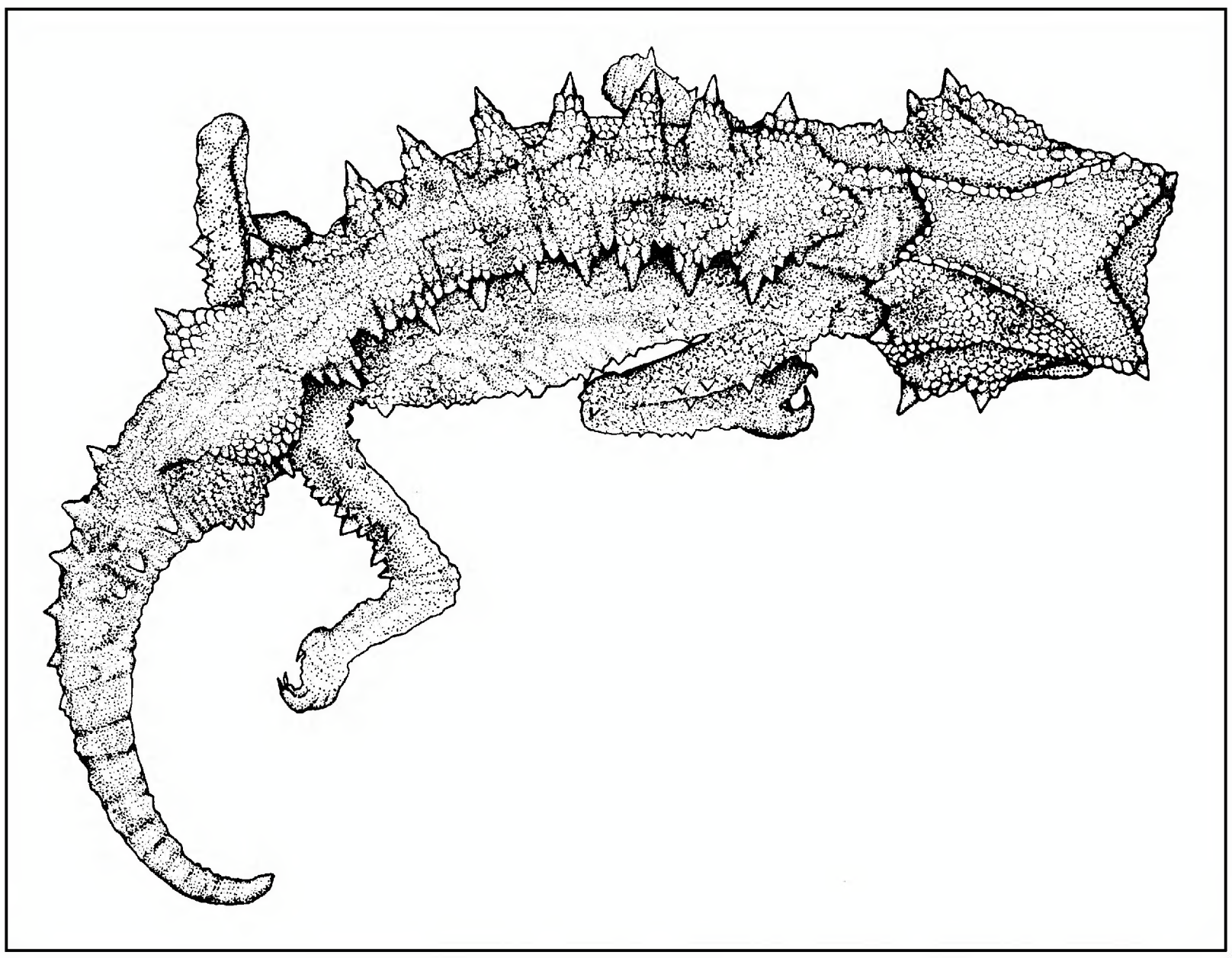
BULLETIN
of the
Chicago Herpetological Society

Volume 39, Number 12
December 2004



BULLETIN OF THE CHICAGO HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY
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The *Bulletin of the Chicago Herpetological Society* (ISSN 0009-3564) is published monthly by the Chicago Herpetological Society, 2430 N. Cannon Drive, Chicago IL 60614. Periodicals postage paid at Chicago IL. **Postmaster:** Send address changes to: Chicago Herpetological Society, Membership Secretary, 2430 N. Cannon Drive, Chicago IL 60614.

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Bull. Chicago Herp. Soc. 39(12):221-224, 2004

Notes on High Altitude Geckos of the Genus *Altigekko* in Northeastern Pakistan

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Abstract

An identification key and short notes on morphology, ecology and distribution of high altitude geckos from northeastern Pakistan are provided.

Introduction

Four high altitude angular-toed geckos are now known from northwestern Pakistan (Khan, 2004). Descriptions and related information regarding some of these taxa were published in Indo-Pakistan journals that are not readily available in the West. A key to the identification, brief notes of morphology, ecology and distribution are of these taxa are presented in this paper.

Indo-Pakistan highland taxa have a checkered history of generic placement: *Gymnodactylus* (Steindachner, 1869; Annandale, 1913; Boulenger, 1913; Minton, 1966), *Alsophylax* (Szczerbak, 1991); *Cyrtodactylus* (Mertens, 1969; J. Anderson, 1872); *Gonyodactylus* (see Khan [2003] for references), and *Mesodactylus* (Khan, 2001; Khan and Rösler, 1999). Recently, Khan (2003) erected a new genus, *Altigekko*, to include these peculiar high altitude Himalayan angular-toed geckos.

General characteristics

Geckos of the genus *Altigekko* are of medium size (79 to 102 mm total length); head and body are flattened. The natural tail is a little longer than the body, and can be round (*baturensis*, *boehmei*) or depressed (*stoliczkai*). Tail segments are marked by deep lateral lobes (*stoliczkai*) or rings (*baturensis*, *boehmei*), which are more evident in the anterior half of the unregenerated tail. The tail is fragile at its base; a regenerated tail is much swollen. Small, conical, protuberant caudal tubercles arise from the middle of the tail segments, and become indistinct by mid-tail. There are several rows of small subcaudal scales. Dorsal scales are granular, convex, mostly juxtaposed; laterally they are arranged in transverse rows, interspersed with three times larger, but similar, smooth (*stoliczkai*, *yarkandensis*) or feebly keeled (*baturensis*, *boehmei*) oval tubercles. The tubercles are arranged in more or less longitudinal rows, and are rare on head and limbs. Distinct frontal and postnasal pits are present. Femoral and precloacal pores are absent. The dorsum is light gray to light brown with an inconspicuous pattern of M-shaped wavy transverse light-brown bands (broader than the interspaces) with heavier posterior margins; the ventrum is lighter.

Table 1 quantifies comparative morphometric counts of *Altigekko* geckos.

Natural history

The high altitude geckos are widely distributed in the Karakoram Range of the Greater Himalayas (4500–6000 m). This range is in extreme northeast Pakistan and India, lying between 34–37°N and 67–77°E (Figure 1). The habitat is a vast, dry, cold alpine desert, including the ice-fields of Chitral, Gilgit, Hunza and Baltistan, where some of the highest peaks and many deep valleys are located. The mountains are permanently snow covered, while glaciers arise several hundred meters above the snowline. The area is highly arid with a subtropical continental highlands cold climate. Winters are heavily snowy; rain occurs during the spring and short summer (June–August). July maximum temperatures average 24°C, minimum 10°C; maximum winter temperature in January averages -1°C, -13°C. Maximum rainfall is received during August (average 100 mm); minimum precipitation occurs during November (average 2 mm) (Ahmad, 1951).

As summer sets in, conditions in the valley bottoms (2000 m below) become rapidly habitable, climatic changes occur vertically. The peripheral edges of the bottom rocks, alpine slopes, and stream beds are bared, constituting a special cold arid habitat. The habitat is soon covered by several associated plant species: *Hippophae rhamnoides*, willow (*Salix*), *Mertensia tibetica*, *Potentilla desertorum*, *Tribulus terrestris*, *Peganum harmala*, *Capparis spinosa*, *Sophora alopecuroides*, *Lycium ruthenicum*, *Festuca altaica* and *Poa attenuata*. The plants and uneven stony terrain provide protection and retreats for the local amphibians and reptiles. Pools at the sides and bed of ravines are utilized as breeding sites by the amphibians. Human activity becomes visible along valley slopes that are

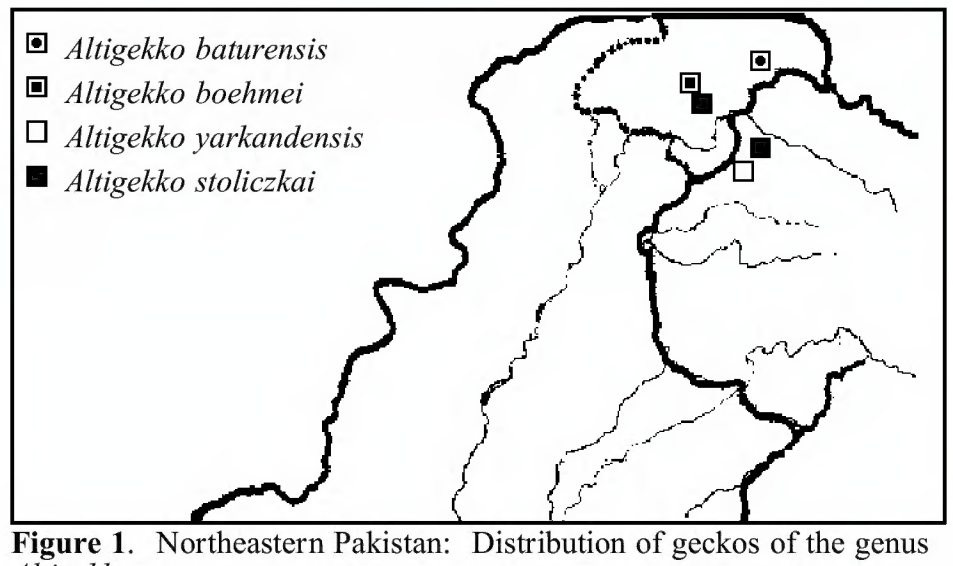

Figure 1. Northeastern Pakistan: Distribution of geckos of the genus *Altigekko*.

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Table 1. Morphological comparison of high altitude geckos of the genus *Altigekko* of Pakistan (measurements in mm). Data from 1 = Khan, 1994; 2 = Khan, 2000; Khan and Rösler, 1999; 3 = Khan and Baig, 1992; 4 = Szczerbak, 1991.

Character	*yarkandensis* [1]	*stoliczkai* [2]	*baturensis* [3]	*boehmei* [4]
Snout–vent length	47.15	46–48	44–53	34–39.5
Tail length	?	49	55–57	35–50.4
Head:				
length	11.5	10.8	13.3	7.2
breadth	9.3	9.6	10.1	9.1
height	5.3	5.2	5.9	4.4
Supralabials	11/10	10–13	9–11	8–9
Infralabials	8/8	7–8	7–9	6–7
Nasals	3	3	3	3
Postmental pairs	2	3	3	3
Subdigital lamellae under 4th toe	25	25	24–27	22
Interorbitals	15–16	16–20	17–20	20
Midbelly scales	29–33	27–32	26–30	28
Midventral scales	138–140	117–150	158–171	109
Preanal pores	?	?	?	?
Ear diameter	0.8	1.1	1.5	0.5
Eye diameter	2.4	2.9	3.3	1.5
Adpressed limb:				
finger to	snout tip	anterior eye	nostril	snout tip
toe to	elbow	shoulder	axilla	mid-neck
Crossbands:				
on body	7	8	8	7
on tail	?	?	?	11– 12

tilled and soon terraced lush green rice-fields and orchards appear in the landscape. The crops mostly consist of food grains and fruits, which are carefully preserved and stored for use through the long winter.

Summer is the boom time for local animals. Swarms of winged insects are a usual feature in the summer evenings. Winged and wingless insects converge under the light posts attracting toads, geckos, and even some diurnal lizards, to feed on them. Four highland species of toads have been recorded from the different parts of the area: *Bufo himalayanus*, *B. latastii*, *B. pseudoraddei baturae* and *B. siachinensis* (Khan, 2004). Each species occupies a similar ecological niche. The toads usually frequent grasses and leaf litter, retreating under stones and into crevices during the day. They are readily attracted to human habitations to feed on photophilic insects, where often they stay under household objects, occasionally emerging to catch flies etc. Similarly the local geckos, which in nature retreat in crevices and holes among rocks, caves and caverns, hiding under loose stones, rocks etc., readily invade nearby edifices mostly to feed on photophilic insects. There they hide under wall hangings and other household objects. Gruber (1981) reports collecting *A. stoliczkai* from rocky habitat, where it preferred bare, dry situations in the non-irrigated areas without or with very sparse vegetation, apparently avoiding close proximity with human settlements. The three agamids collected from the nearby mountains are *Laudakia badakhshana*, *L. tuberculata* and *L. himalayana*. They are diurnal: during the daytime they feed on vegetation among the rocks. However, if close to edifices often they will sneak into them to take refuge from the cold during the night. Though the grass-field skink, *Scincella ladacensis*, is quite common around grasses and stones, it is difficult to catch one. The serpentine reptile is very agile, escaping under rocks and in clumps of grass and spiny bushes from where it is difficult to retrieve. The Himalayan pitviper, *Gloydius himalayanus*, is quite common on the bushy, stony slopes of the hills, moving about sluggishly among rocks and bushes during sunny days. It is generally looking for the skinks that constitute its main dietary item (Khan, 1999; Khan and Tasnim, 1986).

Key to the species of the genus *Altigekko* in Pakistan

1. Tail round, segments indistinct ----------3
   Tail flat, laterally deeply divided, indicating segments ---- 2

2. Mid-ventrals 138–140 ---------- *Altigekko yarkandensis*
   Mid-ventrals 142–149 ---------- *Altigekko stoliczkai*

3. Mid-ventrals 109–120 ---------- *Altigekko boehmei*
   Mid-ventrals 158–171 ---------- *Altigekko baturensis*

Altigekko baturensis (Khan and Baig)
Batura glacier gecko
1992 *Tenuidactylus baturensis* Khan and Baig, Pakistan J. Zool. 24(4):273-277.
Distribution: Known from type locality Passu and Khyber, Gilgit Agency, northern Pakistan, 36°20′N, 74°50′E.

Altigekko boehmei (Szczerbak)
Karakorum gecko
1991 *Alsophylax* (*Altiphylax*) *boehmei* Szczerbak, Salamandra 27:53-57.
Distribution: Known from type locality Skardu, Ladak, northeastern Pakistan 33°18′N, 75°37′E.

Altigekko stoliczkai (Steindachner)
Baltistan gecko
1869 *Gymnodactylus stoliczkai* Steindachner, 1869, Reise Novara, Zool. 1:15 Rept. 1, Plate 2, Fig. 2, 2a.
Distribution: Type locality Karoo, north of Dras, Kashmir, India. However, this gecko has been found to have wider distribution in Baltistan and Gilgit, northeast Pakistan, 34–36°N, 75–77°E (Auffenberg, pers. com.).

Altigekko yarkandensis (J. Anderson, 1872)
Ice field gecko
1872 *Cyrtodactylus yarkandensis* J. Anderson, 1872, Proc. Zool. Soc., London: 381.
Distribution: Blanford (1875) restricted type locality to Ladakh, northeastern Pakistan, 34–36°N, 75–77°E (Zhao and Adler, 1993).

Concluding remarks

Baltistan (Gilgit Agency and Ladak), northeastern Pakistan, is a high altitude (elevation 2300 m), cold desert lying in the north of the state of Jammu & Kashmir. Several Karakoram Range glaciers (Baltoro, Concordia, Kaberi, Kandus, Siachen, etc.) lie in the east along the bordering area with China, while the desolate Deosai Plateau forms its western border. Several torrents drain glaciers into the Shyok River which ultimately joins the Indus River in the northwest (Adamson and Shaw, 1981). Several valleys of varying breadth and depth occur in the area, isolating local fauna and flora from each other in different populations. Recent collections from the valleys have yielded several closely allied species of toads (Mertens, 1971; Khan, 1997; Stöck et al., 2001) and geckos (Khan, 1992, 1993, 1994; Khan and Baig, 1992; Golubev and Szczerbak, 1981).

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Bull. Chicago Herp. Soc. 39(12):224-225, 2004

Book Review: *Giant Tortoises of the Indian Ocean: The Genus* Dipsochelys *Inhabiting the Seychelles Islands and the Extinct Giants of Madagascar and the Mascarenes* by Justin Gerlach 2004. 207 pp. Edition Chimaira, Frankfort am Main. Hardcover. ISBN 3-930612-63-1. $49.55.

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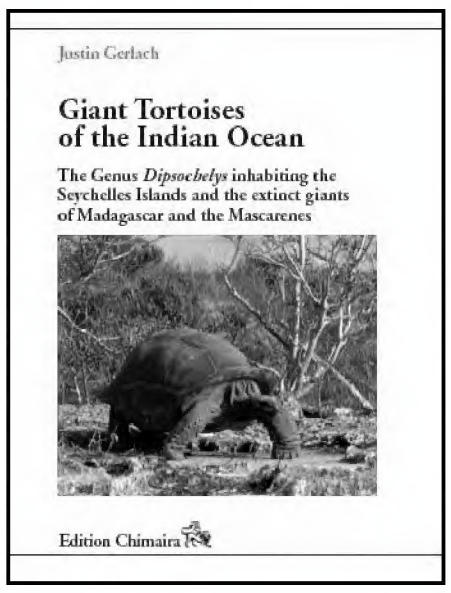
Justin Gerlach
Giant Tortoises of the Indian Ocean
The Genus *Dipsochelys* inhabiting the Seychelles Islands and the extinct giants of Madagascar and the Mascarenes
Edition Chimaira

The 1200-mile-long island of Madagascar and its satellite groups of islands, the Comoros, Seychelles and Mascarenes, lie in the Indian Ocean off the west coast of southern Africa. This region is a unique home for "living fossils" both in the ocean (e.g., coelacanth fishes) and on the islands themselves. When the subject of giant tortoises comes up, most of us think first of those that inhabit the Galapagos. However, the living and extinct giant tortoises of the Indian Ocean are special in their own way and much more diverse than many of us realize. Justin Gerlach has captured the essence of these creatures in a book that is more detailed about the subject than any other that I am aware of.

At present, two groups of tortoises are recognized in the Indian Ocean. These have been considered as subgenera of the genus *Geochelone*, but are presently considered to be distinct genera by several authors cited in the book (p. 10). *Dipsochelys* Bour, 1982, is presently known only in the Seychelles Islands (Aldabra, the Amirantes, and the granitic islands) but lived on Glorieuse, Madagascar and possibly the Comoros islands until about 500 years ago. *Cylindraspis* Fitzinger, 1835, lived only on the Mascarene Islands before this tortoise became extinct in the 18th Century. The book presents a succinct diagnosis of both of these genera on page 11. A significant feature in *Dipsochelys* is the presence of a nuchal (cervical) scute on the anterior end of the carapace. This feature is unknown in any other giant tortoise. In *Cylindraspis* the toothlike structures on the jaws are striking, as may be seen in Figure 6 of the book.

Each of these genera is presently considered to be composed of six species (Bour, 1984; Gerlach and Canning, 1998). *Dipsochelys dussumieri*, the Aldabra tortoise, is by far the best known species of the genus in the region and has made a remarkable recovery from an almost catastrophic decline. In 1890 only about 1,000 individuals of the Aldabra tortoises existed, but various forms of protection have led to a population of about 100,000 individuals at present. The author points out that this animal is at once highly resilient and very vulnerable and that there is much that one can learn about population management from such groups of animals.

Dipsochelys daudinii is of unknown origin and the last one was collected in about 1825; *D. hololissa* is known in the wild based on only one individual on Cerf Island and two others that were transported to Cousine Island from Cerf in 2001; *D. arnoldi* is represented in the wild by only one free-ranging individual on Cousine Island. All of these localities for the above species are in the Seychelles. *D. grandidieri* and *D. abrupta* became extinct in Madagascar about 1,050 and 750 years ago, respectively, and are known only on the basis subfossil material. The six species of the extinct genus *Cylindraspis* were all collected from a total of four islands in the Mascarenes.

At the end of Chapter 1 one finds two informative figures in color on facing pages. Figure 9 is a cladogram of the phylogenetic relationships of the living tortoise genera of the world including the recently extinct genus *Cylindraspis*. This cladogram is based on both morphological and molecular data. Figure 10 presents a world map of the distribution of living and extinct giant tortoises.

Chapter 2 mainly deals with the tangled taxonomic and phylogenetic history of the Indian Ocean giant tortoises. There is much variation in populations of both *Dipsochelys* and *Cylindraspis*; thus one is faced with the taxonomic problem of

whether to lump or split. For instance, some molecular studies have been used to suggest to suggest that all living *Dipsochelys* belong to a single species; and the author of the book himself suggests that the difference between species, subspecies, and races is always arbitrary. A cladogram of the phylogeny of the species of *Dipsochelys* and *Cylindraspis* from 10 million years ago to the present is presented in Figure 38.

As pointed out in Chapter 3, which covers the morphology of these giant tortoises, the abundance of associated skeletal material of both living and extinct giant *Dipsochelys* has enabled scientists to describe the species of these tortoises in detail, including data on individual variation, changes during growth and development, and sexual differences. On the other hand, the fact that most of the bones of the extinct genus *Cylindraspis* are disassociated limits direct comparisons of species within this genus. However, significant differences between the genera *Cylindraspis* and *Dipsochelys* have been pointed out based on the disassociated skeletal material of the former genus. Comparisons of Indian Ocean giant tortoises with different forms of the Galapagos giant tortoise (*Chelonoidis*) have shown some interesting structural convergences.

The drawings, photographs, and data tables in Chapter 3 nicely supplement the text. Figure 44 presents drawings that show the differences between the neural bones of all six species of *Dipsochelys*. Figure 46 is composed of drawings of the skulls of each of these species in lateral and frontal view. Figures 47 and 48 detail the body skeleton of the Aldabra tortoise, *D. dussumieri*. Figures 52–54 juxtapose photographs of the skulls of *Dipsochelys*, *Cylindraspis* and *Chelonoidis* in lateral view. A section in Chapter 3 also deals with a comparison of the soft anatomy of these giant tortoises on the basis of the available material. Several nicely drawn figures of soft tissue parts supplement the text.

Chapter 4 deals with each of the six species of *Dipsochelys* and *Cylindraspis* on the basis (when possible) of (1) distribution, (2) type material, (3) diagnosis, (4) shell, (5) body, (6) skull, (7) post-cranial skeleton, (8) pectoral girdle and fore limbs, (9) pelvis and hind limbs, and (10) significant notes. Skeletal drawings and photographs of each species are provided. Parenthetically, it will interest the reader that the Aldabra tortoise had 14 previous scientific names before it became *Dipsochelys dussumieri* in 1998.

Chapter 5 dwells on the ecology of giant tortoises. Topics include (1) adaptation to harsh conditions, (2) diet and health, (3) behavioral interactions, (4) breeding and recruitment, (5) vulnerability and predators, (6) movement, and (7) numbers and feeding. A final section in Chapter 5 deals with the ecology of the extinct species of giant tortoises. It is pointed out here that *Cylindraspis* probably included both browsing and grazing species based on the domed (grazing) and saddle-backed (browsing) forms. The extinct species of *Dipsochelys* may have also had dietary differences. Color photographs of habitats and individual Aldabra tortoises enhance Chapter 5.

Chapter 6 covers the discovery of Indian Ocean giant tortoises and their history since these events occurred. This chapter points out the vast number of giant tortoises that existed in these mainly harsh islands in the Indian Ocean in the past. Chapter 7, the final chapter in the book, provides a discussion of conservation issues. An interesting discussion involves the breeding facilities at the La Vanille Crocodile Park in the Mauritius and the Seychelles Tortoise Conservation Project. A survey of living tortoises in the Seychelles located small numbers of *Dipsochelys hololissa* and *D. arnoldi* in captivity and a relict group of *D. hololissa* on Cerf Island. An attempt to save these species in the wild has met with rather dismal results. The photos in this chapter are very engaging, including such shots as a living, saddle-backed, *Dipsochelys hololissa* male.

The author, Justin Gerlach, was born and raised in the Seychelles, and it certainly shows in his book, which is detailed to an extent that no other book on the subject approaches. In addition to a well written text, replete with instructive figures, photographs, maps, and tables, the book lists 251 references. I strongly suggest that anyone interested in herpetology, zoology, ecology, or conservation in general will be more than happy with this moderately priced book.

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Bull. Chicago Herp. Soc. 39(12):226-229, 2004

HerPET-POURRI

by Ellin Beltz

Another year bites the dust

Thanks to everyone who contributed articles to this column in 2004 and thanks especially to people who are going to contribute articles in 2005 for there is the future of this column. My book on frogs of the world (Firefly Books, Toronto) is headed to the press in February. Stay tuned, I'll keep you up to date with when it will actually come out.

Vote early, vote often

You probably have a day or two left to pack the ballot boxes and vote for your state reptile and/or amphibian. Access the online balloting at http://www.state.il.us/ltgov/zoo.asp and follow the instructions. If you know anything about me you also know I was raised in Chicago politics. Consider this: I voted. This rather fun game was brought to your state by the Lt. Governor. I found a lovely article in the Southern Illinoisan, September 16, 2004: "There are six candidates vying for our approval in two separate races. Running on the amphibian slate are the . . . gray tree frog . . . the eastern tiger salamander . . . and the American toad, a toxic warty hopper with a face only a mother toad could love. Rounding out the reptile race is the eastern box turtle, noted for its bright yellow, orange and black shell patterns which are found splattered all over Southern Illinois highways in the spring and summer; the common garter snake, which has a penchant for spooking gardeners and landscapers; and the painted turtle, which floats in our strip pits and creeks. These six beat out formidable competition by the broad-headed skink, the worm snake and the river cooter in primary balloting. The idea for the election was spawned by the Chicago Herpetological Society which is not, as rumor has it, comprised of Windy City aldermen." The writer adds that the the "two lucky creatures will join other state symbols like the white oak, violet, cardinal, monarch butterfly, bluegill, white-tailed deer and the Tully monster (our official fossil) and forever celebrated by all Illinoisans. . . . This election would be unnecessary if Blagojevich and Quinn would get together and discuss their pet projects. The governor is looking for an official beverage of Illinois and Quinn wants an official reptile. They should make a call to Anheuser-Busch. Maybe they can strike a deal and get Budweiser and Louie the Lizard in the same package." [http://www.southernillinoisan.com/rednews/2004/09/16/build/opinions/OPI002.html, from Wes von Papineau] Let's not forget those frogs, too!

Terror from the skies

For the last few months military planes from Guam that haven't been inspected for brown tree snakes before takeoff have been landing in Hawai'i, according to the *Honolulu Advertiser*, October 25, 2004. Researchers have determined that the island of Guam was infested with brown tree snakes (*Boiga irregularis*) by U.S. cargo planes during the Second World War. As many as 10,000 snakes per acre have been counted on Guam today, and around 6,000 snakes have been confiscated at their ports. Before snake inspections on Guam were instituted, seven tree snakes were found in or near Hawaiian cargo. The current problem is due to layoffs, which have forced Guam workers to not be around when the military wants to leave. So they fly to Hawai'i inspection or no inspection. [from G.E. Chow] Never you mind that the U.S. caused the disaster in the first place by moving the snakes and now the taxpayer is paying more than $17 million dollars a year in snake charges and it will go way far higher if they ever get loose on Hawai'i; if the flyboys want to fly, boy they're going to fly. Hopefully someone's C.O. will read and weep and make these guys stay on the ground until the Guam snakefinders can have a go through the plane. Maybe the C.O. needs to point out that *Boiga* is venomous and a snake in your lap at 30,000 feet probably wouldn't be very funny. It might even look like an air hose on your helmet or your belt until it bit you. No, no, no just fly whenever you want to and don't forget your essentially useless snakebite kit. You might need it.

There had to be a mobile home here somewhere

"Daytona Beach, Florida -- A man who swung an alligator at his girlfriend during an argument was sentenced to six months in jail. . . . Officials said [he] was keeping the 3 foot gator in his bathtub and swung it at his girlfriend . . . then beat her with his fists, then grabbed the gator and swung it at her as she tried to escape. The gator struck [her] at least once, after which time [he] threw empty beer bottles at her and then kicked her out of their mobile home. . . ." [*Miami Herald*, September 10, 2004, from Alan Rigerman]

Sue grew fast

The tyrannosaur known as Sue at the Field Museum of Natural History has been studied by researchers around the world. Lately it was found that she reached adult size at age 19 and lived to 28 years old by counting growth rings in her bones. Sue grew incredibly fast during childhood and "teen years," then slowed in adulthood to just maintaining her skinsuit. From age 14 to 18, she may have added up to 4.6 pounds a day. [*Chicago Tribune*, August 12, 2004]

Helping hands

For some reason, a few hawksbill turtle nestlings failed to leave their nests on Punalu'u beach south of Hilo, Hawai'i. So the hatchlings "were dug up by national park staff. . . ." They were escorted to the water by volunteers and children. No one knows where baby hawksbill turtles go after leaving the nest; it is estimated only one in 5,000 reaches maturity. [*Honolulu Advertiser*, October 21, 2004, from Ms. G. E. Chow] With about 150 in a nest that means every single turtle in 33 nests has to live to bring one breeding adult back to the beach.

Thanks for the first 500 Giant Sea Turtles

"SeaWorld Orlando personnel stand by . . . after releasing the 500th sea turtle to be rehabilitated there. It waded safely into the Atlantic Ocean at Cocoa Beach, Florida. The 100-pound loggerhead received six months of specialized care. SeaWorld handles the majority of its sea turtle rescues during the summer months because of accidents involving increased boating

and recreational activities in areas frequented by the turtles." [*The Commercial Appeal*, Memphis, Tennessee, September 1, 2004, from Bill Burnett] Thank you to Mary Ann Madden's wonderful *New York Magazine* competitions for the title of this paragraph and many wonderful reads.

Sorry Madam, that's an ex-planet

"What we're seeing here is completely unprecedented declines and extinctions," said Simon Stuart, of the World Conservation Union which led a recent study on amphibian declines worldwide. As published in *Science Magazine* [thank you Bradford Norman and Eloise Beltz-Decker] and reprinted in newspapers around the world the declines are incredible and frightening. "There are a variety of reasons for some losses, while others remain a mystery. . . . Their decline could be an indication that something sinister is underway in the environment. . . . 1,856 species or 32.5 percent of all those known are `globally threatened' under the categories defined by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). This is whopping when compared with birds with 12 percent and mammals at 23 percent in the same category. It just gets worse and worse, the more you read the numbers. Nearly 500 species are declining rapidly, nine have gone extinct since 1980 and 113 are considered to be possibly extinct because they haven't been reported from the wild in years. Here are some raw numbers from the report:

Place / # species threatened* (total # species**) % threatened

Haiti / 46 (47) 97.8
Cuba / 47 (60) 78.3
Guatemala / 74 (133) 55.7
Mexico / 191 (358) 53.5
Honduras / 53 (101) 52.5
Philippines / 48 (111) 43.2
Colombia / 208 (583) 35.7
Ecuador / 163 (434) 37.5
Costa Rica / 61 (184) 33.1
World / 1856 (5,711) 32.5
Venezuela / 68 (287) 29.4
Cameroon / 50 (171) 29.2
India / 66 (231) 28.6
Panama / 52 (182) 28.6
China / 86 (340) 25.3
Madagascar / 55 (217) 25.3
Malaysia / 45 (198) 22.7
Peru / 78 (352) 22.2
Australia / 47 (228) 20.6
U.S. / 51 (283) 18.0
Brazil / 110 (681) 16.2

Sources:
* from *Science* as reported in the *Honolulu Star Bulletin*, October 15, 2004, from Ms. G. E. Chow.
** World Resources Institute—http://earthtrends.wri.org

Too dangerous for whom?

As we reported way back then, when Florida first began offering alligator hunting licenses back in 1988, gator hunters thought they'd get rich off the hides of the formerly protected species. In fact, for a few years, gator hide was bringing about $40 a foot. But it's dropped by half and most people who are hunting alligators in Florida—and paying the state a $250 premium to do it—are considered to be layman hunters. The head of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's alligator management section said, "It's the joy of being part of the process of pursuing a large animal and a top predator and all the excitement that goes with that. People are participating now just to have a good time." Many are hiring guides. The one featured in this article thinks bang sticks are too dangerous. So for his clients, the good time includes the alligator's death by cutting "its spinal cord with a knife." The animal was subdued with a gaff and had its jaws taped shut and was alive when this occurred. [*Miami Herald*, October 14, 2004, from Alan Rigerman]

What a way to go

A 44-year-old Cincinnati woman was bitten by a venomous snake in her home, drove herself to the hospital and died there later the same day. "Neighbors were unaware of her collection of at least nine poisonous snakes until police went to the suburban . . . house. Police believe an urutu pit viper bit the woman. . . . Reptile specialists from Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Gardens searched the house with an ambulance waiting outside. The venomous snakes were in secure plastic cases. . . . Non-venomous animals were found under boxes and piles of clothes. [*Chicago Tribune*, September 13, 2004, from Ray Boldt]

It's a small gene pool in a small town

"Someone had stolen about 80 snakes from a heated storage shed and hid them in the woods [in Point, North Carolina] apparently hoping to sell them. But two people shunned the solicitation and alerted the owner . . . a recreational reptile breeder working to grow the hobby into a business. . . . [He recovered] 26 ball pythons, 10 red-tail boas and about 45 corn snakes . . . worth about $2,600." [*The Daily Journal*, Kankakee, Illinois, November 4, 2004, from Donna Moe]

This is a weird one

"The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission has charged an Orange County environmental consultant with sixty-nine criminal charges including destroying habitat, relocating sick tortoises and submitting false statements to the commission. The incidents in the charges occurred in three Florida counties. "The investigation began after a wildlife commission employee discovered a discrepancy between blood-test results [the man] provided with his application to relocate tortoises and results submitted directly to the commission by the testing laboratory. . . . To relocate gopher tortoises . . . a developer must submit blood-test results showing the tortoises are free of upper respiratory disease . . . because the disease can be spread so easily," according to the *Orlando Sentinel*, August 18, 2004, from Bill Burnett.

Politicians unclear on the concept

"Sea turtle eggs aren't the only thing buried on the shores of Hillsboro Beach. The town's commissioners have buried their heads there too. While virtually every other coastline town in

Florida has complied with federal regulations and approved ordinances restricting lights on beaches, which disorient the endangered [sea turtle] hatchlings as they make their way to the sea, the leaders of this small, northern Broward burg won't budge. . . . `We love our turtles,' [the mayor] professed. `We love our residents. But people pay taxes and own property, turtles don't. These are people who've paid a fortune to have beach access.' That includes the mayor himself. `I have 100 feet of windows facing the beach,' he said. `It would cost me $20,000 to cover them. . . . ' A sea turtle expert . . . suggested that sooner or later federal or county officials would enforce the rules if the town doesn't. `Let the feds come and enforce them,' sneered [the] vice mayor," according to the *New Times*, Broward–Palm Beach, Florida, September 30–October 6, 2004, from Alan Rigerman. One wonders if anyone paid the turtles the "fortune for beach access," but can only hope the juju of thousands of disoriented turtle babies and their disappointed parents drove recent hurricanes right for that 100 feet of glass on a barrier island at 26¼N, 80¼W. If not, there's plenty of "feds" reading this column. Have at `em, boys.

Koopa my thoughts to myself

Named for the evil turtles in the Super Mario videogame, Koopa the famous eBay painting turtle was recently featured in an Associated Press article. Koopa's paintings are selling like hot cakes on eBay ever since an article in a London newspaper announced to the world how his owner, also a painter, squirts nontoxic paint on canvas and then lets the turtle smear it around. She photo documents everything so people know the turtle really did it. Finished paintings have sold at nearly $500 and some paintings have run up a bidding war. [*Miami Herald*, September 21, 2004, from Alan Rigerman]

Ignorance is no excuse

The *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* [November 15, 2004, from Steve Barten] reports "In the past year, several states have struggled with a resurgence in baby turtle sales, which are illegal. Health officials are concerned—the baby turtle craze in the 1970s was blamed for thousands of cases of salmonellosis, some of which were lethal. . . . In 1970, the Food and Drug Administration prohibited the distribution and sale of baby turtles with shells four inches in length or less, after a quarter million infants and small children developed turtle-associated salmonellosis . . . [due to not] washing their hands after contact. Turtles with shells smaller than four inches are more dangerous because children can put them in their mouths." Various loopholes have been used but worse is the report at the end of the article. The researcher ordered a batch of "*Salmonella*-free" turtles from a southern producer. Taking the turtles to a different lab revealed "every single one tested had *Salmonella*."

Tales of two species

- A 54-year-old Fort Myers, Florida, woman was mauled by a 12-foot, 457-pound alligator while she was landscaping a Sanibel Island home. She was the 14th known fatality of an alligator since Florida began keeping records. There are perhaps a million or so alligators in Florida—although they were once nearly hunted to extinction. [*Miami Herald*, July 25, 2004, from Alan Rigerman]

- Meanwhile a man pulling weeds along the shore of a lake outside Tavares, Florida, was attacked by an alligator, but escaped by punching it in the nose. A trapper later caught and killed the beast which weighed in at 385 pounds. [*Chicago Tribune*, July 29, 2004, from Ray Boldt and *Orlando Sentinel* from Bill Burnett]

- "A man has been cited in the stabbing death of an alligator nicknamed `Elvis' by the residents of the golf club community the reptile called home. The five-foot alligator was found dying in October with a hunting knife lodged in its head." A 49-year-old Sarasota resident has told the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission that he killed the gator in self-defense while fishing. He claimed it grabbed his bait and lunged at him when he went to cut the line. He faces up to 60 days in jail and $500 if convicted. [*Miami Herald*, November 6, 2004, from Alan Rigerman]

Gentlemen, stop your engines

"The second war over beach driving has begun. Months after threatening a lawsuit, [a] longtime turtle advocate . . . and seasonal Flagler County resident . . . filed a lawsuit against Flagler County, claiming that beach driving is harming sea turtles and violates the Endangered Species Act. . . . The same legal argument that drastically changed beach driving in Volusia County . . . where beach racing gave birth to NASCAR, officially barred driving from nine miles of beach, ended nighttime driving and set up a $360,000 annual bureaucracy to help protect the turtles. [*Orlando Sentinel*, August 30, 2004, from Bill Burnett]

Food for Thought from *Moko*

"If baby cats are kittens, and baby dogs are puppies, baby hares leverets and baby swans cygnets, what on earth are baby geckos called?" [*MOKO*, Journal of the New Zealand Herpetological Society, June 2004]

Interesting observations

Ray Boldt wrote: Not much to report news-wise, I'm waiting for man bites alligator, now that will be news. . . . I spend a lot of time at my daughter's horse farm . . . just west of downtown Barrington. In all the time I spend out there I have never seen any garter snakes. Deer, coyote, skunks and one large common snapper which we helped across the road, but no garter snakes. When I was a kid you couldn't walk across a field without seeing many garter snakes. They don't use chemicals [on the farm] because of the animals, so I am going to start looking for garter snakes. From time to time I will let you know how my study is going. Anyway, I'm feeling good and I can get around by myself and drive my new car. So things are going ok. Hope the same for you!"

Hurricanes impact turtles

Storm surges associated with the various hurricanes eroded beaches across the southern U.S. in 2004. Hard hit was Hutchinson Island in south Florida where more than 10 feet deep of beach was removed right down to the rocks. The loss

of beach also resulted in the loss of sea turtle nests and potential nesting places. [*South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, September 8, 2004, from Alan Rigerman]

And contributors, too
Long time contributor Bill Burnett wrote and said that hurricane Charlie forced him to take his mother from her home and to Daytona Beach where they were "followed" by the storm to the Breeder's Expo. Then his mom went to England, which is why there were no Florida clippings for a while. As she came back, Orlando Airport was closed because of yet another hurricane, Francis. What a Fall!

Sounds like a great book
A Sheltered Life: The Unexpected History of the Giant Tortoise by Paul Chambers (John Murray publishers) was reviewed in the *London Daily Mail*, July 5, 2004. The review was sent to contributor Bill Burnett by his Aunt Peggy who lives over there. I found the piece absolutely fascinating and full of things I didn't know. While I knew about Darwin and the giant tortoises, I didn't know that Albert Gunther at the British Museum convinced a millionaire, Lord Rothschild, to try to save giant tortoises. Rothschild leased the island of Aldabra in the Indian Ocean and helped relocate a few tortoises from the Galapagos to zoos around the world where a few Rothschild tortoises still are alive. There was so much in the newspaper article, that I'm going to keep my eyes out for the book itself! Check out the picture of me on my webpage http://ebeltz.net. That tortoise, said to be over 400 years old in the 1960s could easily have been a Rothschild relocated tortoise.

Volunteer worker?
A 53-year-old volunteer worker at an exotic animal business was bitten by an African green mamba while taking care of the snake. Venom 1 supplied antivenin and the man is expected to make a full recovery. [*Miami Herald*, July 28, 2004, from Alan Rigerman]

Like coils and water
The second Burmese python removed from the Everglades Alligator Farm outside Florida City was 10 feet long. One of the curators said, "The last few years, we've been catching a lot of pythons in the area." The employee who actually grabbed it said, "Fortunately it was a small snake. Anything over 10 feet is pretty dangerous." [*South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, July 30, 2004, from Alan Rigerman]

Iguana get a piece of the American Dream
"Just before Christmas last year, a park-goer discovered nine 5-foot iguanas in a bathroom at John Prince Park [Del Ray Beach, Florida]. . . . [The] director of Palm Beach County Division of Animal Care and Control, suspected someone had abandoned the lizards because they had blankets with them. `Usually iguanas don't carry around sleeping bags,'" she said. Meanwhile, one fellow has formed the Iguana Rescue and Compound and has become known as the Iguana Man of the Treasure Coast because of his education efforts on behalf of the common green iguana. And residents all over southern Florida bemoan the naturalization of these voracious herbivores. The little tiny ones that first escaped are now wild and breeding. Reported to be the size of beagles, they use Florida's canal systems as getaway routes and munch down thousands of dollars in ornamental plantings and sentimental flowers daily. [*Miami Herald*, August 9, 2004, from Alan Rigerman]

Thanks to everyone who contributed this month. You can contribute, too. Merely take whole pages of newspapers (they don't weigh much), put your name on each piece, fold a minimum of times and send to me: Ellin Beltz, POB 1125, Ferndale, CA 95536. Letters to my email ebeltz@ebeltz.net

Bull. Chicago Herp. Soc. 39(12):230, 2004

In 1957 Karl Patterson Schmidt, then Curator of Zoology at the Field Museum, died after suffering the bite of a boomslang. His family included the sentiments below in their Christmas card that year.

Ecological Imperative

When I have lain beneath the gleaming stars
And watched the wheeling constellations pass,
My meditations have ranged wide, and turned at last
To frame myself within the outermost coordinates.

We must extend a new Imperative
To all creation, our environment;
Given us on trust for our brief decades here,
And for our race, for but how few millennia!

What then is wisdom's last conclusion?
What do freedom and salvation mean?
He alone is saved whose life is lost
In love of others, or of other, than himself.

Karl P. Schmidt

Canyon Hondido
Sierra del Carmen
April 5, 1945

Unofficial Minutes of the CHS Board Meeting, November 12, 2004

Linda Malawy called the meeting to order at 7:30 P.M. Board members Melanie Aspan, Betsy Davis and Lori King were absent.

Officers' Reports

Recording Secretary: Melanie being absent, Mike Dloogatch read the minutes of the October 22 board meeting. Corrections were made and the corrected minutes were accepted.

Treasurer: Jim Hoffman presented the October financial report. Jim briefly went over the new format for the income statement, and pointed out that through the end of October our income has slightly exceeded our expenses although a substantial portion of that income is tied up in restricted funds.

Membership Secretary: Mike Dloogatch reported the death on September 30 of Honorary Member Esther Lewis, one of the founders of the CHS. There was discussion of what might be an appropriate memorial.

Corresponding Secretary: Steve Spitzer reported that the Irons Oaks Environmental Learning Center, now being developed in south suburban Flossmoor / Olympia Fields, would like to form some sort of cooperative partnership with the CHS. This had been outlined in a PowerPoint presentation that Steve had forwarded to board members earlier. The center had asked for a letter from the CHS supporting their request for grant funds from the Illinois State Museum. After some discussion, the board agreed that such a letter would be appropriate.

Sergeant at Arms: Brian Jones missed the October general meeting; attendance was 68 by Ron Humbert's count.

Committee Reports

Shows: Jenny Vollman reported that for the November 19 show at Gompers Park, we needed to specify the Chicago Park District in our insurance policy. This will be done at their expense.

ReptileFest: Steve Sullivan has been very happy with the cooperation and advice he's been getting from Sandy Quinn of *Reptiles* Magazine. Steve asked everyone to think about newsletters or other publications that might accept an ad for ReptileFest, and to provide him with contact info for any such. The latest ReptileFest flyers now include a blurb about the CHS on the reverse side. The next 'Fest committee meeting is scheduled for Linda Malawy's on Saturday, January 8.
Raffle: Ron Humbert stated that we have plenty of raffle items on hand, especially 10-gallon tanks. Jack Schoenfelder has volunteered to run the raffles next year.

Adoptions: Linda Malawy has calculated that, since the inception of the Adoptions Fund, $380 in donations came along with alligators we took in, and thus, as decided at the previous board meeting, are earmarked to reimburse Bob Bavirsha.
Nominating Committee: It turns out that Sierra Club representatives will not be able to attend the November meeting. Ron Humbert will attempt to put together a panel of veterinarians to provide a program.

Chicago Wilderness: Ron Humbert and Steve Spitzer have signed up to attend the annual Chicago Wilderness Congress at Depaul University on November 18. They will report on it at the December CHS board meeting.

Old Business

State Reptile/Amphibian: Ron Humbert reported that if all goes as planned, resolutions will be presented to the state legislature in January to officially adopt our State Amphibian and State Reptile as decided by the on-line voting now taking place.

Board meeting venue: Steve Spitzer reported that if we pay in advance to hold our monthly board meetings at North Park Village, we would be able to cancel meetings with advance notice, and wouldn't have to pay again until we have held 12 meetings. Mike Dloogatch moved that the CHS sign a contract to hold 12 meetings at NPV at a cost of $50/month (one meeting free). The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Field Museum Parking: Jenny Vollman has resubmitted our request for reimbursement.

AV Equipment: Steve Spitzer moved to allocate funds not to exceed $3000 for use by John Bailey and Jim Hoffman to purchase for the Chicago Herpetological Society a computer and projector suitable for PowerPoint presentations. Matt Campbell seconded. The motion passed, all in favor.
Meeting Days: The informal poll of attendees at the October meeting revealed little enthusiasm for a change to a Friday night meeting date. Steve Sullivan thinks it unlikely that the Nature Museum would agree to reserve one Friday night a month for us, because they often hold paying events there on Friday evenings.

New Business

Insurance: Linda Malawy informed the board that she is exploring alternative insurance carriers.

DAPTF: A motion was made and seconded to donate $50 to the Declining Amphibian Populations Task Force. The motion passed with none opposed, Jim Hoffman abstaining.

ReptileFest Profits: Steve Sullivan brought up for discussion the possibility that ReptileFest net income or some portion thereof might be dedicated to one or more conservation projects or organizations.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:55 P.M.

Respectfully submitted by Michael Dloogatch for Melanie Aspan, Recording Secretary.

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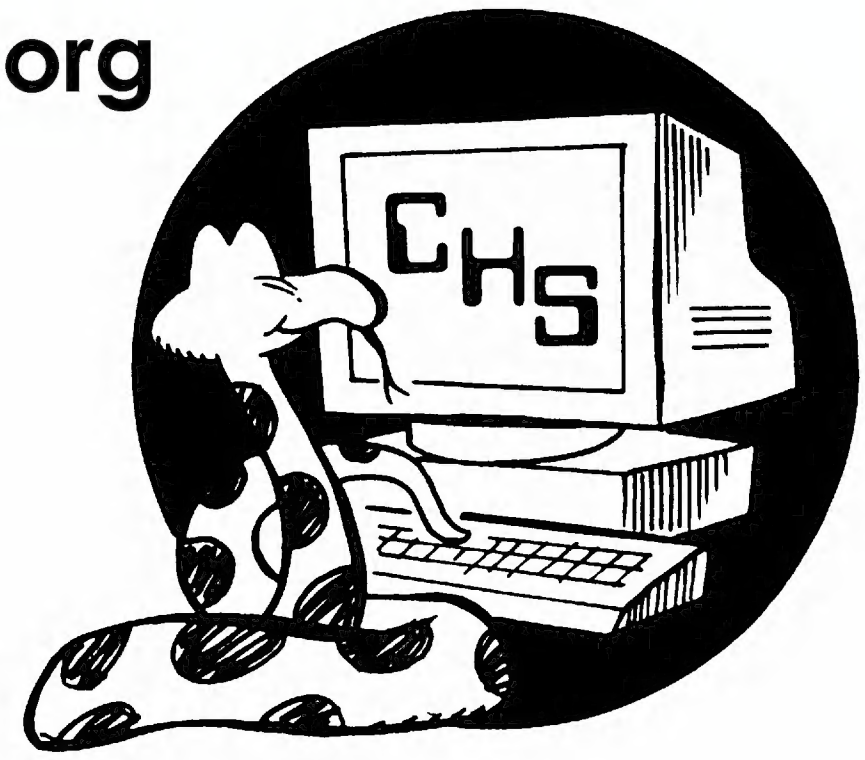
Next time you surf the WorldWide Web, crawl, run, slither, slide, jump, or hop over to the CHS web site!

www.chicagoherp.org



You'll find:

- **Announcements**
- **CHS animal adoption service**
- **CHS events calendar & information**
- **Herp news**
- **Herp links**
- **Meeting/guest speaker information**
- **Photos of Illinois amphibians & reptiles**
- **Much, much more!**

Chicagoherp.org is accepting applications for banner advertisements or links from herpetoculturists and manufacturers of herp-related products. Visit the site and contact the webmaster for details on how you can sponsor CHS!

ReptileFest is coming soon and you are invited to be part of the fun! Exhibits by CHS members are the backbone of 'Fest and are a great opportunity for you to share your herpetological knowledge.

The mission of ReptileFest is to educate that herps are good neighbors, both as pets and in the wild; to promote principles of conservation and husbandry; to promote the CHS as a worthwhile group; to give members an opportunity to have fun and grow; and to gain members.

Any exhibit that incorporates these goals has a place at ReptileFest. Some ideas for exhibits include: unique adaptations or morphology, captive color morphs, natural variation, related species, best beginner herps or interesting advanced herps.

If you don't have an animal to bring, or even if you do, consider creating an educational poster. Possible topics might be: What is a herp?; venomous U.S. herps; anatomy; reproduction; herp housing; jobs in herpetology; myths and facts; food and feeding; or herp trivia.

Exhibit at ReptileFest and win prizes from ZooMed

Use your imagination to come up with interesting, educational, and attractive displays. All exhibitors at ReptileFest will be eligible to win prizes from ZooMed laboratories worth up to $100. Prizes will be awarded for the best display in three categories:

- Best first-time exhibitor: This category is open to anyone who is exhibiting at ReptileFest for the first time.
- People's choice: This category is open to all exhibitors and will be voted on by our visitors.
- Exhibitors' choice: This category is also open to all visitors but is voted on only by other exhibitors.

Details will be posted at ReptileFest.com. If you would like to discuss potential exhibit ideas, or just want to help out at 'Fest, email reptilefest@gmail.com

The Chicago Herpetological Society Presents
The 12th Annual
Nation's Largest Educational Reptile and Amphibian Show
ReptileFest
April 2-3
10am to 5pm
o Hundreds of spectacular reptiles and amphibians
o 40,000 square feet of exhibits, vendors, and activities
o Talk with experts and vets about care and handling
o Touch or hold giant snakes, tortoises, and other amazing animals
o Have your picture taken with cool critters
o Enjoy fantastically fun family activities
ReptileFest is sponsored by:
University of Illinois-Chicago
P.E. Building
901 W. Roosevelt Road
(One block west of Halsted)
Adults $8.00
Children (3-11) $6.00
-no animals for sale-
visit www.ReptileFest.com
for coupons and more info

UPCOMING MEETINGS

The next meeting of the Chicago Herpetological Society will be held at 7:30 P.M., Wednesday, December 29, at the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, Cannon Drive and Fullerton Parkway, in Chicago. **Douglas Chien**, Conservation Field Representative for the Illinois Chapter of the Sierra Club will speak on "The Wilds of Illinois: Shawnee National Forest." The Sierra Club's Shawnee Wilderness slide show will take you on a tour of nine special areas located within the Forest: the Wilderness areas.

On January 26, **Maureen Kearney**, of the Field Museum of Natural History, will speak to us on "Two Difficult Problems in Herpetology: The Evolution of Worm-lizards and the Origin of Snakes."

The regular monthly meetings of the Chicago Herpetological Society take place at Chicago's newest museum — the **Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum**. This beautiful new building is at Fullerton Parkway and Cannon Drive, directly across Fullerton from the Lincoln Park Zoo. Meetings are held the last Wednesday of each month, from 7:30 P.M. through 9:30 P.M. Parking is free on Cannon Drive. A plethora of CTA buses stop nearby.

Board of Directors Meeting

Are you interested in how the decisions are made that determine how the Chicago Herpetological Society runs? And would you like to have input into those decisions? If so, mark your calendar for the January 14 board meeting, to be held at the North Park Village Administration Building, 5801 North Pulaski Road, Chicago. To get there take the Edens Expressway, I-94, and exit at Peterson eastbound. Go a mile east to Pulaski, turn right and go south to the first traffic light. Turn left at the light into the North Park Village complex. At the entrance is a stop sign and a guardhouse. When you come to a second stop sign, the administration building is the large building ahead and to your left. There is a free parking lot to the left and behind the building.

The Chicago Turtle Club

The monthly meetings of the Chicago Turtle Club are informal; questions, children and animals are welcome. Meetings normally take place at the North Park Village Nature Center, 5801 N. Pulaski, in Chicago. Parking is free. For more info call Lisa Koester, (773) 508-0034, or visit the CTC website: http://www.geocities.com/~chicagoturtle.

HERP OF THE MONTH

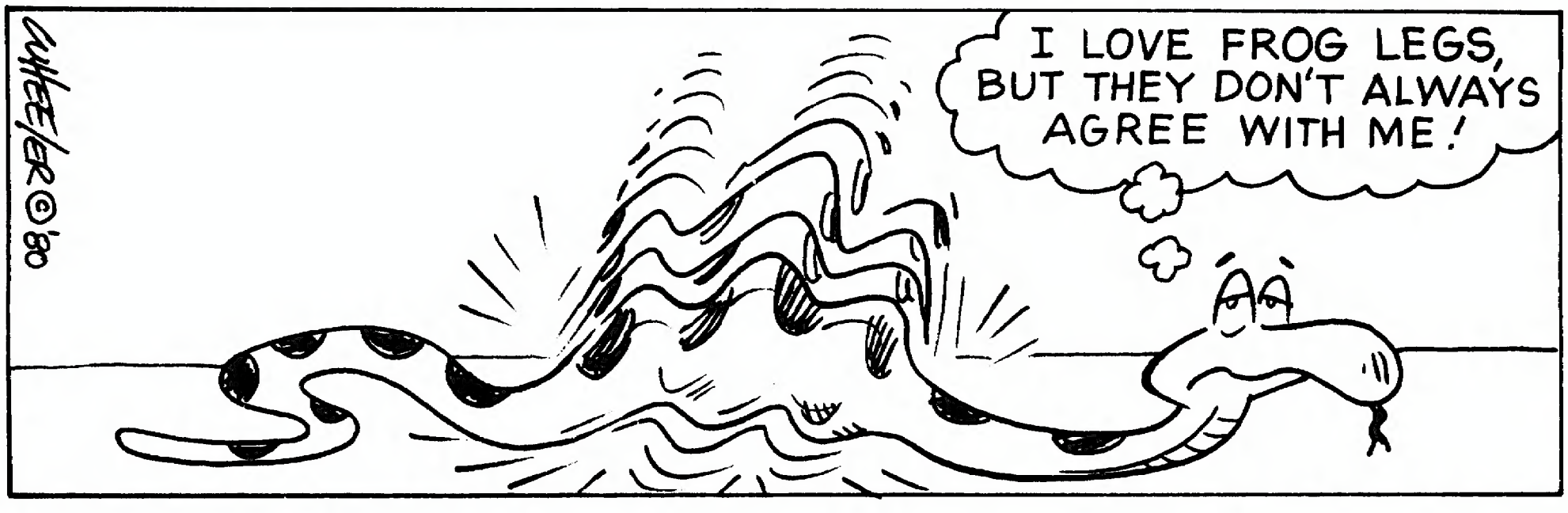
Each monthly meeting will showcase a different herp. CHS members are urged to bring one specimen of the "Herp of the Month" to be judged against the entries from other CHS members. Prizes will be awarded to the top three winners as follows: 1st place—6 raffle tickets at next meeting; 2nd place—4 raffle tickets at next meeting; 3rd place—2 raffle tickets at next meeting. December is once again skinks, since they got snowed out in November.

ELECTION RESULTS

As a result of the elections held November 24, 2004, the following officers and members-at-large will serve on the CHS Board of Directors for the year 2005.

President:	Lori King	Membership Secretary:	Steve Spitzer
Vice-president:	Linda Malawy	Sergeant-at-arms:	Ron Humbert
Treasurer:	Jim Hoffman	Members-at-large:	Sean Bober
Recording Secretary:	Melanie Aspan		Betsy Davis
Corresponding Secretary:	Deb Krohn		Steve Sullivan
Publications Secretary:	Mike Dloogatch		Jenny Vollman

THE ADVENTURES OF SPOT



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